

1. Why are you proposing this now?

- The Master Plan calls for changing zoning in this area to allow for more of a campus/community feel there.
- Several planning and economic development studies have recommended that the Town consider adding residential and other commercial uses to this area as a way to begin to decrease traffic congestion.
- Recent market studies have also shown that the demand for speculative office space in this area is currently minimal and will likely remain stagnant. These conditions call for encouraging different development approaches to attract new investment and jobs – and encouraging our current employers to grow.
- The property owners of the 9/90 Office Park asked us to consider rezoning that area in order to give them more development options, including retail/restaurant and housing.

2. Is this zoning is being pushed (or worse, written) by a developer?

- The idea to introduce mixed use into this area has been identified by studies and supported by research.
- The Development community has indicated that most signs point to a softening office market with not a great long-term outlook while housing needs continue to grow as the state and the region lose talented people to skyrocketing cost of living driven by tight residential housing markets.
- Framingham is at a crossroads, we can establish guidelines for new residential growth now or wait for office developments that will take years or decades to evolve if ever.
- A developer, affiliated with one of our major 9/90 Corporate Center property owners has come forward with a preliminary proposal that would benefit from rezoning. However, they have not written nor been part of the discussions around researching and writing this new zoning language. Through effective zoning, the Town can leverage the opportunity to capture benefits (new investment, new jobs, retained jobs, growing incumbent companies) while also minimizing and managing impacts.

3. Why does “more residential” seem to be the solution to all of our zoning challenges?

Interest in the multifamily housing market reflects current real estate realities and a long-term desire to support our major employers and tax-payers. Also, many of our commercial zones do not allow residential now even though we recognize that mixing the uses will create more vibrant and sustainable communities.

- Eastern Massachusetts is experiencing a substantial housing shortage. MAPC estimates a shortfall exceeding 400,000 units by 2030.
- The region’s office and commercial markets reflect very high vacancy rates, with lower-cost alternatives throughout the Metrowest region.
- Framingham’s major employers consistently report that access to high-quality talent is a top challenge.
- This strategy is part of an effort to protect existing neighborhoods by allowing more mixed uses and higher densities in nodes where it makes sense and can create critical mass for retail and transit options.

Multifamily residential development cannot be the solution for all of Framingham’s challenges. However, it should be considered carefully in each case, with strict controls to manage growth.

4. What happens to the existing rental housing when we build newer units?

Most of the existing multi-family rental units in Framingham (not the single family or small scale multi-family) were built during boom times in the 1960s and without renovation are up to 50 years old. When new multi-family units are built, it puts pressure on existing owners to either invest in their properties or accept lower rents. If an owner chooses not to invest and a property falls into disrepair in violation of state health and building codes they are subject to code enforcement actions.

5. If we build more rental housing will we decrease the civic engagement in town?

If we create more rental units in Framingham, we will not decrease the amount of civic engagement from current levels. We are not replacing currently owned properties with rental properties. In fact even if only a handful of new residents in rental housing get engaged in the local government and organizations, there will still be more civic engagement than currently.

6. If we go over 50% rental vs. ownership the town will spiral into decline.

There is absolutely no evidence to support this claim and in fact rental vs. ownership does not appear to be a factor in which cities are considered successful and which are not. Rental housing is a necessary element of any vital, diverse community and is required for a healthy housing market. Thriving communities have a variety of housing options for all ages and income levels. The communities listed below are some of the most dynamic urban areas in the world and they meet the wide variety of housing needs in their communities.

While Framingham is not New York or Boston, there is little proof that a community will decline with higher rental populations. This table indicates that the idea that having more than 50% rental units does not correlate to a loss of community character or viability.

PERCENT OF HOUSING UNITS OCCUPIED BY RENTERS ¹	
New York, NY	66%
Boston, MA	63%
San Francisco, CA	62%
Los Angeles, CA	61%
Dallas, TX	55%
Austin, TX	54%
Chicago city, IL	53%
Houston city, TX	53%
San Diego, CA	51%
Columbus, OH	51%
Seattle, WA	50%
Baltimore, MD	49%
Denver, CO	48%
Memphis, TN	47%
Detroit, MI	46%
Philadelphia city, PA	45%
Indianapolis, IN	44%
Nashville-Davidson	44%
Charlotte, NC	43%
Phoenix city, AZ	41%
San Antonio, TX	41%
San Jose, CA	41%
El Paso, TX	41%
Fort Worth, TX	40%
Jacksonville, FL	38%

In a report produced last year, the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies concluded the following:

“Rental housing has always provided a broad choice of homes for people at all phases of life. The recent economic turmoil underscored the many advantages of renting and raised the barriers to homeownership, sparking a surge in demand that has buoyed rental markets across the country. But significant erosion in renter incomes over the past decade has pushed the number of households paying excessive shares of income for housing to record levels. Assistance efforts have failed to keep pace with this escalating need, undermining the nation’s longstanding goal of ensuring decent and affordable housing for all.”²

¹ <http://dmdatabases.com/databases/consumer-mailing-lists/interesting-renter-statistics>

² http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs_americas_rental_housing_2013_1_0.pdf

Question 6. Continued...

Additionally, the Harvard study noted: *“Rental markets continue to adapt to the unprecedented surge in demand that began in the mid-2000s. Although initially ignited by the bust in housing and mortgage markets, rental growth is likely to remain strong as members of the huge millennial population enter the housing market. According to the latest JCHS projections, individuals that are currently under age 30 will form over 20 million new households between 2015 and 2025, and most of these households will be renters. There will also be a large increase in renters over age 65 as more members of the large baby-boom generation cross this threshold over the coming decade.*

To keep rents from rising even more sharply, it will be essential to ensure that an adequate supply of rental housing is available to accommodate this upcoming wave of demand. To that end, the growing pipeline of new multifamily rentals is a positive trend. Of course, some markets could face an oversupply of rental units if the ramp-up in multifamily construction goes on for too long. So far, though, there is no evidence that this is an imminent threat.”³

More information on multi-family housing research can be found here:

<http://nmhc.org/Content.aspx?id=4708>

7. If the commercial tax rate is higher, why should we allow conversion from commercial properties to mixed use or even solely residential uses?

There are two main reasons for allowing more residential and mixed use in targeted areas:

- 1) Allowing for use flexibility will mean less underutilized land. A vacant or underutilized commercial property will (in most cases) pay less in taxes than a fully-leased or owned residential property. In addition, property taxes for residential do not fluctuate like commercial income does so the tax revenues are more steady. Therefore it is in the Town’s best interest to allow more use flexibility to take advantage of all market opportunities to maximize revenue.
- 2) Mixed-use zoning is considered sound planning practice as communities have evolved from assuming a strict separation of uses to promoting mixed uses as a way to encourage vibrant communities that function 24 hours per day and serve many needs within a walkable distance to reduce vehicular traffic. Many of our current zoning solutions include adding residential to commercial areas because we believe it will lead to more vital, walkable communities. In addition, as current demand for residential far outstrips demand for commercial in a saturated retail and office market, allowing residential uses on traditionally “commercial-only” parcels will allow underperforming parcels to have chance of being redeveloped in a shorter time-frame along mixed use guidelines that we support.

³ <http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs-sonhr-2015-ch5.pdf>

8. Shouldn't we save that land in the 9/90 Corporate Center for office or other commercial use?

- Framingham has an opportunity and a decision.
- The Town could wait to see if the saturated MetroWest office markets will recover, leaving valuable land lying fallow in an area targeted for growth because of infrastructure and location. Some of this land, though targeted for development, has conditions (such as steep slopes) that make it expensive to redevelop and would be among the last parcels in the region to see new commercial investment.
- The Town could decide to take advantage of documented needs and sound planning to introduce mixed use elements into an area that could benefit in the long term from more population density and residents who can walk or bike to work as well as providing critical mass for future transit solutions.

9. Why can't we go higher?

We could go higher. The more square feet we have the more taxable area the Town adds to its tax base. That said, there is a desire in Town to manage growth to allow for appropriate infrastructure growth and allowing higher buildings seems too dense to many. In lower density areas we generally propose 6/7 stories or about 70 feet because those are the cut off points in Massachusetts building code where a building must go from being a predominantly wood or "stick" structure to being constructed out of more expensive steel. In this area, we are proposing up to 150 feet because a new steel-structure building is not financially viable under a certain number of stories.

10. What if this zoning isn't ready, we haven't had enough time to 'vet' it?

While we want everyone to understand the intent and the implications of the CMU zoning, we feel this proposal is ready to be considered at Town Meeting. It is not as complicated as some of the more recent zoning efforts such as TOD and the several rounds of recodification the Planning Board has undertaken lately. We are prepared to bring it forward for consideration now or at annual town meeting in the spring.

11. Will the water table rise if we put development in Tech Park/9-90? Will additional development harm the reservoirs?

No, every new project is required to manage their own stormwater run-off on-site so new development does not impact existing water bodies with flooding or contamination.

12. What are the tax implications for the town of adding residential in the CMU? Will the new tax revenue cover the cost of additional school, police, , and other services?

We believe tax revenues would increase enough to cover any new services required, however we have not finished investigating the implications. We are currently working with the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Assessor, the CFO, DPW, and the School Department to better quantify those impacts, both revenue and expected demand on services.

13. Impact on traffic?

All projects will be evaluated on the basis of traffic studies generated through the Planning Board's site plan review process. This process will identify needed mitigation as part of any approval conditions. However, we expect additional traffic impacts to be limited:

- Additional commercial space will generate net new employment at full occupancy. In addition to traffic mitigation, new commercial projects will be encouraged to explore transit alternatives, through the MetroWest Transit Management Association, to reduce additional cars.
- Housing units are expected to serve Tech Park and 9/90 employers. For these workers, auto alternatives such as walking, biking, or shuttle buses could pull cars off the road.
- Additional retail space will likely serve nearby employers or housing. These will be served by existing auto traffic, or transit alternatives.